

Weinberger said

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Caspar Weinberger, the burden of his criminal defense lifted by President Bush's Christmas Eve pardon, charged Sunday that the Iran-Contra special prosecutor tried to "coerce false testimony" from him implicating Ronald Reagan.

Mr. Weinberger said special counsel Lawrence Walsh, who has pursued the case for six years, brought charges against him only after Mr. Weinberger had refused to cooperate in the prosecution of higher ups in the Iran-Contra scandal.

"Cooperation meant giving them the testimony that they wanted that would enable them to implicate President Reagan," Mr. Weinberger said, referring to Mr. Walsh and his assistants.

"When they couldn't get that, then they went after me with five felony counts, all of which they would have been perfectly willing to drop if I had, quote, 'cooperated' with them. And I wasn't going to cooperate with them," he said.

Mr. Weinberger commented on ABC-TV's "This Week With David Brinkley" program.

Walsh tried coercion

The secretary of defense in Reagan's administration, continuing a bitter war of words with Mr. Walsh, accused the prosecutor of pursuing a political agenda against the former president. He said the prosecutors offered to allow him to plead guilty to one misdemeanor of withholding information from Congress.

"Yes, he was trying to coerce false testimony," Mr. Weinberger said.

Mr. Walsh's spokeswoman, Mary Belcher, disputed Mr. Weinberger's assertion.

"Walsh did not ask Caspar

Weinberger to incriminate anyone," Mr. Belcher said in a telephone interview. "False testimony is the last thing a prosecutor wants. All he asked Weinberger for was the truth."

In an angry response to the pardon of Mr. Weinberger and other figures in the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran, Walsh's assistant, James J. Brosnahan, said Saturday that Mr. Bush may have granted pardons to avoid being a witness at Weinberger's trial.

Mr. Bush, vacationing in Texas, declined to answer reporters.